Long Live The King

By MARY ROBERTS RINEHART

CHAPTER III.

At the Riding School.

His royal highness the Crown Prince Ferdinand William Otto was in disgrace.

He had risen at six, bathed, dressed, and gone to mass, in disgrace. He had breakfasted at seven-thirty on fruit, cereal, and one egg, in disgrace. He had gone to his study at eight o'clock for lessons, in disgrace. A long line of tutors came and went all morning, and he worked diligently, but he was still in disgrace. All morning long and in the intervals between tutors he had tried to catch Miss Braithwaite's eye.

Except for the most ordinary civilities, she had refused to look in his direction.

The French tutor was standing near a photograph of Hedwig, and pretending not to look at it. Prince Ferdinand William Otto had a suspicion that the tutor was in love with Hedwig.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto did not like the French tutor.

He also found the sun unsettling. Besides, he hated verbs. Nouns were different. One could do something with nouns, although even they had a way of having genders. Into his head popped a recollection of a delightful pastime of the day before—nothing more nor less than flipping paper wads at the guard on the scenic railway as the car went past him.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto tore off the corner of a piece of paper, chewed it deliberately, rounded and hardened it with his royal fingers, and aimed it at M. Puaux. It struck him in the eye.

Instantly things happened. M. Puaux yelled, and clapped a hand to his eye. Miss Braithwaite rose. His royal highness wrote a rather shaky French verb, with the wrong termination. And on to this scene came Nikky for the riding lesson.

Nikky surveyed the scene. He had, of course, bowed inside the door, and all that sort of thing. But Nikky was an informal person, and was quite apt to bow deeply before his future sovereign, and then poke him in the chest.

"Well!" said Nikky.

"Good morning," said Prince Ferdinand William Otto, in a small and nervous voice.

"Nothing wrong, is there?" demanded Nikky.

M. Puaux got out his handkerchief and said nothing violently.

"Otto!" said Miss Braithwaite. "What did you do?"

"Nothing." He looked about. He was quite convinced that M. Puaux was what Bobby would have termed a poor sport, and had not played the game fairly. The guard at the railway, he felt, would not have yelled and wept. "Oh, well, I threw a piece of paper. That's all. I didn't think it would hurt."

Miss Braithwaite rose and glanced at the carpet. But Nikky was quick. Quick and understanding. He put his shiny foot over the paper wad.

"Paper!" said Miss Braithwaite. "Why did you throw paper? And at M. Puaux?"

"I—just felt like throwing something," explained his royal highness. "I guess it's the sun, or something."

Nikky dropped his glove, and miraculously, when he had picked it up the little wad was gone.

"For throwing paper, five marks," said Miss Braithwaite, and put it down in the book she carried in her pocket. It was rather an awful book. On Saturdays the king looked it over, and demanded explanations: "For untidy nails, five marks! A gentleman never has untidy nails, Otto. For objecting to winter flannels, two marks. Humph! For pocketing sugar from the tea tray, ten marks! Humph! For lack of attention during religious instruction, five marks. Ten off for the sugar, and only five for inattention to religious instruction! What have you to say, sir?"

Prince Ferdinand William Otto looked at Nikky and Nikky looked back. Then Ferdinand William Otto's left eyelid drooped. Nikky was astounded. How was he to know the treasury of strange things that the crown prince had tapped the previous afternoon? But, after a glance around the room, Nikky's eyelid drooped also. He slid the paper wad into his pocket.

"I am afraid his royal highness has hurt your eye, M. Puaux," said Miss Braithwaite.

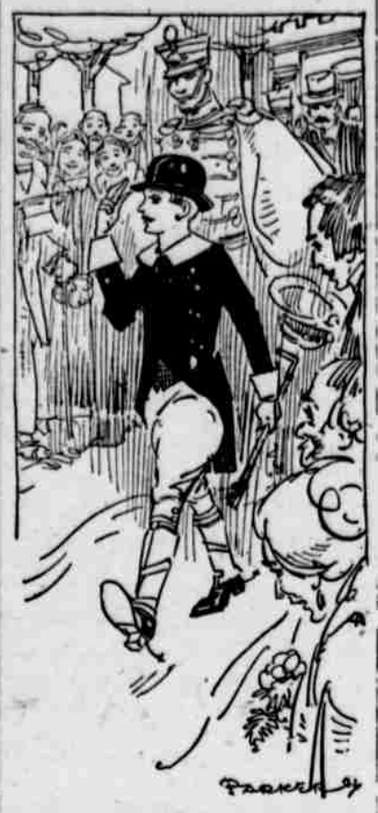
"Not at all," said the unhappy young man, testing the eye to discover if he could see through it. "I am sure his royal highness meant no harm." M. Puaux went out, with his handkerchief to his eye.

While Oskar, his valet, put the crown prince into riding clothes, Nikky and Miss Braithwaite had a talk. It began by Nikky's stating that she was likely to see him a great deal now, and he hoped she would not find him in the way. He had been made aide-de-camp to the crown prince, vice Count Lussin, who had resigned on account of illness, having been roused at day-break out of a healthy sleep to do it.

Not that Nikky said just that. What he really observed was: "The king sent for me last night, Miss Braithwaite, and—and asked me to hang around."

Thus Nikky, of his sacred trust! None the less sacred to him, either, that he spoke lightly. He glanced up at the crossed swords, and his eyes were hard.

And Miss Braithwaite knew. She reached over and put a hand on his arm. "You and I," she said. "Out of all the people in this palace, only you and I! The archduchess hates him. I see it in her eyes. She can never forgive him for keeping the throne from Hedwig. The very



As He Passed Men Lifted Their Hats and Women Bowed.

guards down below, the sentries at our doors, how do we know they are loyal?"

"The people love him," said Nikky doggedly.

"The people! Sheep. I do not trust the people. I do not trust any one. I watch, but what can I do? The very food we eat—"

"He is coming," said Nikky softly. And fell to whistling under his breath.

Together Nikky and Prince Ferdinand William Otto went out and down the great marble staircase. Sentries saluted. Two flunkies in scarlet and gold threw open the doors. A stray dog that had wandered into the court yard watched them gravely.

"I wish," said Prince Ferdinand William Otto, "that I might have a dog. Yesterday I met a boy who has a dog. It sleeps on his bed at night."

Nikky looked back. Although it had been the boast of the royal family for a century that it could go about unattended, that its only danger was from the overzeal of the people in showing their loyalty, not since the death of Prince Hubert had this been true in fact. No guards or soldiers accompanied them, but the secret police were always near at hand. So Nikky looked, made sure that a man in civilian clothing was close at their heels, and led the way across the square to the riding school.

A small crowd lined up and watched the passing of the little prince. As he passed, men lifted their hats and women bowed.

"I have a great many friends," he said with a sigh of content, as they neared the riding school. "I suppose I don't really need a dog."

"Look here," said Nikky, after a pause. "Look here, highness, you didn't treat your friends very well yesterday."

"I know," said Prince Ferdinand William Otto meekly. But Prince Ferdinand William Otto had thought out a defense. "I got back all right didn't I?" He considered. "It was worth it. A policeman shook me!"

"Which policeman?" demanded Nikky in a terrible tone, and in his fury quite forgot the ragging he had prepared for Otto.

"I think I'll not tell you, if you don't mind."

Fortune smiled on Nikky that day. Had, indeed, been smiling daily for some three weeks. Singularly enough, the Princess Hedwig, who had been placed on a pony at the early age of two, and who had been wont to boast that she could ride any horse in her grandfather's stables, was taking riding lessons. From twelve to one—which was, also singularly, the time Prince Ferdinand William Otto and Nikky rode in the ring—the Princess Hedwig rode also. Rode divinely. Rode saucily. Rode, when Nikky was ahead, tenderly.

To tell the truth, Prince Ferdinand William Otto rather hoped, this morning, that Hedwig would not be there. There was a difference in Nikky when Hedwig was around. When she was not there he would do all sorts of things, like jumping on his horse while it was going and riding backward in the saddle, and so on. He had once even tried jumping on his horse as it galloped past him, and missed, and had been awfully ashamed about it. But when Hedwig was there, there was no skylarking. They rode around, and the riding master put up jumps and they took them. And finally Hedwig would get tired, and ask Nikky please to be amusing while she rested. And he would not be amusing at all. The crown prince felt that she never really saw Nikky at his best.

The riding school had been built for officers of the army, but was now used by the court only. Here the king had ridden as a lad with young Mettlich, his close friend even then. The favorite mare of his later years, now old and almost blind, still had a stall in the adjacent royal stables. One of the king's last excursions abroad had been to visit her.

Overhead, up a great runway, were the state chariots, gilt coaches of inconceivable weight, traveling carriages of the post-chaise periods, sleighs in which four horses drove abreast, their panels painted by the great artists of the time; and one plain little vehicle, very shabby, in which the royal children of long ago had fled from a Karnian invasion.

In one corner, black and gold and forbidding, was the imposing hearse in which the dead sovereigns of the country were taken to their long sleep in the vaults under the cathedral. Good, bad, and indifferent, one after the other, as their hour came, they had taken their last journey in the old catafalque, and had joined their forbears. Many they had been: men of iron, men of blood, men of flesh, men of water. And now they lay in stone crypts, and of all the line only two remained.

One and all, the royal vehicles were shrouded in sheets, except on one day of each month when the sheets were removed and the public admitted. But on that morning the great hearse was uncovered, and two men were working, one at the upholstery, which he was brushing. The other was carefully oiling the wood of the body. Save for them, the wide and dusky loft was empty.

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The archduchess was having tea. Her boudoir was a crowded little room. The archduchess liked it because it was warm. The palace rooms were mostly large and chilly. She had a fire there on the warmest days in spring, and liked to put the coals on, herself. She had them wrapped in pieces of paper so she would not soil her hands.

This afternoon she was not alone. Lounging at a window was the lady who was waiting at the time, the Countess Loschek. Just now she was getting rather a wigging, but she was remarkably calm.

"The last three times," the archduchess said, stirring her tea, "you have had a sore throat. In my opinion, you smoke too many cigarettes."

The Countess Loschek was thirty, and very handsome, in an insolent way. She was supposed to be the best dressed woman at the court, and to rule Annunciata with an iron hand, although it was known that they quarreled a great deal over small things, especially over the coal fire.

Some said that the real thing that held them together was resentment that the little crown prince stood between the Princess Hedwig and the throne. Annunciata was not young, but she was younger than her dead brother Hubert.

The countess yawned.

"Where is Hedwig?" demanded the archduchess.

"Her royal highness is in the nursery, probably."

"Why probably?"

"She goes there a great deal."

The archduchess eyed her. "Well, out with it," she said. "There is something seething in that wicked brain of yours."

The countess shrugged her shoulders. Not that she resented having a wicked brain. She rather fancied the idea. "She and young Lieutenant Larisch have tea quite frequently with his royal highness."

"Little fool!" said Annunciata. But she frowned, and sat tapping her teacup with her spoon. She was just a trifle afraid of Hedwig, and she was more anxious than she would have cared to acknowledge. "How far do you think the thing has gone?"

"He is quite mad about her."

"And Hedwig—but she is silly enough for anything. Do they meet anywhere else?"

"At the riding school, I believe. At least, I—"

Here a maid entered and stood waiting at the end of the screen.

"His excellency, General Mettlich," said the maid.

The archduchess nodded her august head, and the maid retired. "Go away, Olga," said the archduchess. "And you might," she suggested grimly, "gaggle your throat."

The chancellor had passed a troubled night. Being old, like the king, he required little sleep. And for most of the time between one o'clock and his rising hour of five he had lain in his narrow camp bed and thought. He had not confided all his worries to the king.

Evidences of renewed activity on the part of the terrorists were many. In the past month two of his best secret agents had disappeared. One had been found the day before, stabbed in the back. The chancellor had seen the body—an unpleasant sight. But it was not of the dead man that General Mettlich thought. It was of the other. The dead tell nothing. But the living, under torture, tell many things. And this man Haeckel, young as he was, knew much that was vital.

At five General Mettlich had risen, exercised before an open window with an old pair of iron dumb bells, had followed this with a cold bath and hot coffee, and had gone to early mass at the Cathedral.

He entered the boudoir of the Archduchess Annunciata, and the countess went out another door, and closed it behind her, immediately opening it about an inch.

The chancellor strode around the screen, scratching two tables with his sword as he advanced, and kissed the hand of the Princess Annunciata. They were old enemies and therefore always very polite to each other. The

They Were Old Enemies.

archduchess offered him a cup of tea, which he took, although she always made very bad tea. And for a few moments they discussed things. Thus: the king's condition; the replanting of the place with trees; and the date of bringing out the Princess Hilda, who was still in the school room.

But the archduchess suddenly came to business. She was an abrupt person. "And now, general," she said, "what is it?"

"I am in trouble, highness," replied the chancellor simply.

"We are most of us in that condition at all times. I suppose you mean this absurd affair of yesterday. Why such a turmoil about it? The boy ran away. When he was ready he returned. He is here now, and safe."

"I am afraid he is not as safe as you think, madame."

"Why?"

He sat forward on the edge of his chair, and told her of the students at the university, who were being fired by some powerful voice; of the disappearance of the two spies; of the evidence that the Committee of Ten was meeting again, and the failure to discover their meeting place; of disaffection among the people, according to the reports of his agents. And then to the real purpose of his visit. Karl of Karnia had, unofficially, proposed for the Princess Hedwig. He had himself broached the matter to the king, who had at least taken it under advisement. The archduchess listened, rather pale.

"Madame, after centuries of independence we now face a crisis which we cannot meet alone. Believe me, I know of what I speak. United, we could stand against the world. But a divided kingdom, a disloyal and discontented people, spells the end."

And at last he convinced her. But, because she was built of a contrary mold, she voiced an objection, not to the scheme, but to Karl himself. "I dislike him. He is arrogant and stupid."

"But powerful, madame. And—what else is there to do?"

There was nothing else, and she knew it. But she refused to broach the matter to Hedwig.

And it ended with the chancellor, looking most ferocious but inwardly uneasy, undertaking to put, as one may say, a flea into the Princess Hedwig's small ear.

As he strode out, the door into the next room closed quietly.

(Continued next week).

MEANING OF JACOBITE TOAST

Glasses Raised to "the Little Gentleman in Velvet" Had a Peculiar Significance Centuries Ago.

"To the little gentleman in velvet" was a favorite Jacobite toast in the reign of Queen Anne. By "the little gentleman in velvet" the Jacobites meant the mole that raised the hummock against which the horse of King William III (William of Orange) stumbled while riding in Hampton court. The king was thrown heavily to the ground, breaking his collar bone. A severe illness ensued under which the king's feeble constitution gave way, and he died early in the year 1702. He left no children and the crown passed to Anne, a sister of William's deceased wife, Queen Mary, and a daughter of the deposed king, James II. It was the plan of the Jacobites to bring back to the throne James the Pretender, a son, it was claimed, of James II by his second wife, Mary of Modena. The execution of their plans was not attempted until the house of Hanover came to the throne. The attempt of the Pretender James in 1715 was a miserable failure, but the attempt of his son, Prince Charlie, in 1745, was a more formidable affair. He collected a considerable force in Scotland, invaded England and reached Derby before compelled to retreat. He was finally defeated at Culloden.